

Release

Communiqué

Canada Seeks Agreement With the U.S. to Protect Northern Caribou Herd

July 6, 1978

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This magnificent herd of 110,000 animals is one of the outstanding international wildlife populations of this remote and beautiful region. For thousands of years it has been a source of food for native communities within its range.

The central idea behind the proposed agreement with the United States, Mr. Marchand said, is the need to manage the entire herd and its range, on both sides of the border, as an ecological unit. In other words, there needs to be a comprehensive approach, which means close and continuing cooperations between the various agencies responsible for caribou and its habitat in both countries.

This information was released to the wire services on the date indicated. Despite the delay, press releases and speeches are mailed to out-of-town media because the content is not time-dependent or because it will be useful for background files.

Cette information a été communiquée aux services de presse le jour indiqué. Malgré le retard, les communiqués et discours sont envoyés aux médias en dehors de la région parce que leur contenu n'est pas dépendant du temps ou parce qu'ils seront utiles pour les dossiers de presse.

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TO PROTECT NORTHERN CARIBOU HERD

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Such an agreement could be very useful in the development and cooperation of research on caribou and in leading to an effective scheme of habitat protection for the entire region used by the herd.

Related to this proposed agreement is an announcement by Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Hugh Faulkner that the Yukon north of the Porcupine River is being withdrawn from further disposition as the first step towards creation of a national wilderness park and a national wildlife area. The boundaries are the same as those proposed in 1970 for the Canadian portion of an Arctic International Wildlife Range and connect with an existing wildlife range in the United States

Mr. Marchand said that withdrawing this area was an important first step in Canada in protecting the range of the caribou herd shared by both countries. It includes the calving grounds in Canada and much of the range used in summer and fall.

Mr. Marchand also welcomed Mr. Faulkner's proposal for a task force to develop plans for protecting the entire range of the caribou herd in Canada. This would include the large wintering range south of the Porcupine River and outside the area now being withdrawn for a park and a wildlife area.

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BACKGROUND: USE OF THE CANADA WILDLIFE ACT TO PROTECT
THE PORCUPINE CARIBOU HERD AND ITS RANGE

One of the available methods of protecting the Porcupine caribou herd and its range is through the use of the Canada Wildlife Act and its Wildlife Area regulations. The Act allows the government to assign Crown lands required for wildlife conservation to the Minister of the Environment so that they may be protected and managed by the Canadian Wildlife Service. The Act also allows the government to make detailed agreements with a province or territory to carry out cooperative research programs and conservation measures.

1. Establishing the critical northern part of the Porcupine caribou range as a national Wildlife Area under the Canada Wildlife Act will have the following advantages:

- a. Wildlife Areas are specifically designed by Parliament for the conservation of wildlife in the national interest. The conservation of large international wildlife populations is the overriding conservation issue in the northern Yukon today.
- b. Establishment of a Wildlife Area will formally involve the Canadian Wildlife Service in management of wildlife populations which migrate extensively between Canada and the United States. The CWS, as the federal wildlife agency, will directly negotiate coordinated management with the United States for these wildlife populations. In addition, the land management agency responsible for the Alaskan portion of the herd's range is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. agency with which CWS has had 60 years of effective joint work on migratory wildlife.

- c. A Wildlife Area will be managed with the conservation of wildlife and its habitat as the primary purpose. Of the various conservation values in the northern Yukon, wildlife requires the most stringent protective measures. Therefore other values such as archaeological and wilderness values will automatically be protected by the establishment of a Wildlife Area. Recreation and any other activities will be strictly limited to avoid interference with wildlife or damaged to wildlife habitat.
- d. Major long-term goals of wildlife conservation and traditional native land use in the northern Yukon are identical: both require conserving in perpetuity wildlife stocks and habitat in the face of pressure from industrial society. A Wildlife Area will accommodate traditional native hunting within the limits of long-term conservation.

2. Establishing agreements under the Canada Wildlife Act with the Yukon and Northwest Territories will permit the coordination of research programs and herd management measures throughout the Canadian range of the Porcupine herd. This will complement the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs' coordination of special land-use regulations throughout the same area.

Co-ordinated research and management of the herd in Canada is essential in order to develop with the United States a program of conservation of the entire herd throughout its range in both countries.

BACKGROUND: MIGRATIONS OF THE PORCUPINE CARIBOU HERD

The Porcupine caribou herd is one of six in Canada, and with a population of about 110,000, represents about one eighth of the migratory barren-ground caribou found on the tundra in Canada. The other five barren-ground herds are George River, Kaminuriak, Beverly, Luenose, and Bathurst.

Two other types of caribou found in Canada are the non-migratory woodland caribou located south of the treeline and the non-migratory Peary caribou living on the Queen Elizabeth Islands in the high Arctic.

The 258,000 square kilometre range of the Porcupine caribou herd covers land in Alaska, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. More specifically, the range reaches from Alaska's Chandalar River in the west to the Richardson Mountains in the east and from the headwaters of the Peel River in the Ogilvie Mountains in the south to the Beaufort Sea in the north.

The calving grounds for the herd are in the foothills and coastal plain of the North Slope from the Babbage River in the Yukon to the Halahula River in Alaska. The Alaskan portion of the calving grounds is protected by the Arctic National Wildlife Range, a unit of the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System. No such protection exists at present on the Canadian side.

The largest winter range is in Canada in the extensive area of the Yukon south of the Porcupine River as far as 64° 30' North, that is, about the latitude of Dawson. There is also winter range in Alaska north of the Yukon River, mostly in a proposed addition to the Arctic National Wildlife Range.

In April or May the herd leaves the winter range and migrates north by north-west to calving grounds near the coast. Calving occurs from the end of May to mid-June, those early arriving cows calving in the north-east corner of the Arctic National Wildlife Range, the later arrivals calving in a contiguous area of the Yukon. Shortly thereafter large post-calving aggregations form on the Alaska side and then in early July begin an easterly movement into the Yukon south-east through the Barn and British Mountains to the headwaters of the Bell, Driftwood and Big Fish Rivers, which is a major staging area. They thence turn westward across the Old Crow Plains and move into Alaska, remaining in the area of the upper Coleen River drainage.

The fall migration to wintering grounds beginning in late August and early September brings most of those not wintering in Alaska eastward along the flanks of the Barn and British Mountains and south across the Porcupine River to the wintering grounds. Others move still farther eastward to the Richardson Mountains and thence south to the wintering grounds. The chronology of this fall movement is very critical, encompassing as it does the breeding period and the need to be in the wintering area before the onset of heavy snows.

Thus, the entire range is used by the herd. The herd could not survive if a significant portion of its range were developed in such a way as to impede migration or disturb calving.

The United States has protected a major portion of its share of the range and now has legislation before Congress which would protect the balance of the Porcupine caribou herd's range in Alaska. The withdrawal of land in the northern Yukon represents a significant first step in meeting the Canadian responsibility for this international wildlife resource.

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